



Apart from 'A' level - what options are available to post-16 students and why does Hampton not teach these?

The new Government Diplomas

You may have seen press comment that these may signal the end of 'A' levels. These are predominantly vocational courses and seem unlikely to surpass or replace 'A' levels as academic qualifications. We have no plans to offer these.

The Cambridge Pre-U

Introduced in September 2008, this is an attempt by the Cambridge International Exam Board to regain the A level "gold standard" by toughening up the syllabuses, according to the 'linear model' whereby all the exams are taken in the summer of the Upper Sixth rather than as modules during the course. The plan is to ensure rigour while retaining choice and avoiding the imposed breadth of the IB. Further, to provide an international element, there is a Global Perspectives Course, and also a research project. Pre-U subjects can either be taken individually or one can "wrap" them inside a Pre-U Diploma. One interesting development is the pic & mix concept: as we understand it, a student will be able to take some subjects at A level and some at Pre-U. This could offer considerable flexibility. As the Pre-U take-up is tiny so far, it is too early to judge. In keeping with other top schools, we are watching progress before taking a decision on this qualification.

The International Baccalaureate (IB)

This comes from the continental tradition of broad-based education to the age of 18. Students follow the full range of disciplines with internationally based syllabuses and also take a Theory of Knowledge course. The IB has attracted a lot of attention recently as the "gold standard" of 'A' level has allegedly lost its shine. The take-up has grown but is still very small compared with 'A' levels. The IB is internationally run and (unlike 'A' levels and the Pre-U) it is not subject to UK regulation and scrutiny.

So what is Hampton's current position on the IB?

At no stage has any Head of Department here stated that s/he believes that the IB is the right answer. Most do not like the syllabuses and feel that choice is limited compared with the range at A level and some feel that they do not give

their subject due weight. We like our boys to be able to choose two or even three Languages, three Sciences, Further Mathematics, or in-depth Classics, if that is what they want. You cannot do that in the IB. Introducing the IB as compulsory for all would not serve the interests of the majority, whose subject preferences are already well formed after an excellent general education to 16. Introducing the IB alongside A levels is expensive; complex timetabling issues can limit flexibility; and a dual system would also subtly introduce a 'sheep and goats' feel in what is very much a 'one for all' school. However, using the Pre-U Diploma or picking the best syllabuses from it alongside A levels, would seem to have merit for the future.

Can we be sure that our son will be excited and challenged academically at Hampton?

Yes. The current Hampton Sixth Former has a free choice of at least three academic A levels to study at considerable depth, but the curriculum is flexible enough to allow many to do more. Those who sit Maths and Modern Language GCSEs early are well placed as they can take AS levels in the Fifth Year. We have enhanced our Sixth Form enrichment programmes. All pupils in the Lower and Upper Sixth will have two periods per week allocated to six-week courses including: Politics and Citizenship, Art History and Cultural Appreciation, Global Perspectives, Community Service, Presentational Training using ICT, Critical Thinking and Science and Technology in Society. All boys sit a further full A level in General Studies and they also have the option of taking an AS level (possibly A level) in Critical Thinking as well. The co-curricular programme remains extensive with an enormous number of opportunities for sporting, dramatic, musical and community service activities. Sixth Formers are also encouraged to take on leadership and teamwork roles within the School as Prefects and as Prefect Mentors to younger pupils. The commitment to a broad, liberal education means that the boys will have gained a great deal more from the Sixth Form that will stand them in the best possible stead for life beyond Hampton School. They are well prepared for job interviews post-University!